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Stalin and the Uses of Psychology.

1. This paper describes in detail the Stalinist attempt to "reconstruct" psychology according to a dogmatic interpretation of Pavlov's "conditioned reflex" theory, in order to turn this science into a pliant tool of the practical imperatives of State and Party policy. Although the significance of "Pavlov's dog" was revealed to the West by the "conditioning" of Korean War prisoners, this aspect of "transformism" remains less known than other Stalinist forays in the field of scientific theory such as "Lysenkoism" and "Socialist Linguistics" to which "Pavlovianism" is related.

2. According to the author, "transformism" means the following: Stalin, with his cult for "necessity" and "natural law" was bent on the building of a body of theories which would justify, and therefore enhance, his ~~power~~ ^{extension} to transform the natural environment. Michurin and Lysenko supplied the "means" of perpetuating by hereditary transmission transformations worked out during the life of living organisms. Pavlov supplied the basis for "psychological conditioning" and the transformation of man by indoctrination.

3. The author summarizes his views as follows:

"I have suggested that the movement initiated by Stalin to reconstruct Soviet psychology marked a decline of the optimistic conception of man which had officially prevailed in the U.S.S.R. since the early thirties. This in turn was an indirect reflection of the fact that millions of Russians, especially under the impact of their experience during and after World War II, showed tendencies to deviate radically from the norm of Soviet selfhood which, according to the optimistic conception, they should have naturally assimilated as a result of their education and spontaneous personality development. In the face of this disturbing fact, Stalin resorted to the peculiar mode of coming to terms with perverse situations which we have termed 'transformism.' In the Pavlovian model of personality he found a formula which seemed to place human nature in the arbitrary power of a state-controlled educational environment. Emptied of all inner springs of character and conduct, man appeared in this model as a passive plaything of determining influences from without, particularly influences of a social character brought to bear through the medium of language. By mastering the 'objective scientific laws' of the language-conditioning process, the state could--theoretically--bring about the 'directed alteration of psychoc processes,' i.e., it could transform the minds of its citizens, mold them in the Soviet personality image".

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In this system man is a "signal-receiving" animal similar to Pavlov's dog. All the State needs to do in order to create a "state-directed man" is to call the signals - through the medium of language (indoctrination) - according to "objective laws" revealed by a study of these "conditioned reflexes", which are not substantially different in man from what they are in beast - according to the Pavlovian approach.

4. The last chapter of the study, noting the recession of Lysenkoism and Pavlovianism under Stalin's successors, concludes that "the change doesn't affect the formal goals of the Soviet power. It has to do with its approach to problems and situations, with its methods of reasoning and motivations which underly them, and with its policy-making orientation. In the broadest sense, it might be described as a tendency to assess situations more factually and to evolve policies designed to alter reality piecemeal rather than to remold it at a stroke. This at least has been the tendency thus far".

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